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General Assembly
Emergency Special Session

Official Records

33rd meeting
Thursday, 15 January 2009, 3 p.m.
New York

President: Mr. D'Escoto Brockmann. . . . . (Nicaragua)

In the absence of the President, Mr. Wolfe (Jamaica), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 5 (*continued*)

Illegal Israeli actions in Occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory

Draft resolution (A/ES-10/L.21)

The Acting President: I give the floor to the Permanent Representative of France in his capacity as President of the Security Council.

Mr. Ripert (France) (*spoke in French*): First, I should like to point out that my country fully supports the statement made by the Permanent Representative of the Czech Republic on behalf of the European Union.

In Gaza we are now witnessing a new spiral of violence, which the Middle East has experienced all too often. The end of the truce between Hamas and Israel on 19 December resulted in an escalation of horror caused by rocket attacks, on the one hand, and a disproportionate military response, on the other.

As all of us here are aware, no one can emerge from this confrontation as the winner. However, the losers now number in the hundreds and the civilian population has been hit hard. The economic and humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip was already worrisome, and the current crisis has made the humanitarian distress of civilians intolerable for the international community. The daily reports from humanitarian agencies are alarming. The distribution of food is being hampered by the closure of crossing points and by the military operations.

We most strongly condemn this morning's bombing by the Israeli army of a hospital, a facility of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and a building housing international media. Israel must refrain from any action contrary to international humanitarian law. The fighting must cease without delay to protect the severely affected civilian population and to permit access for humanitarian assistance. Moreover, we cannot ignore the risk of a regional expansion of the crisis, as demonstrated by the rocket attacks on Israel from southern Lebanon.

However, we now see a strong international mobilization in reaction to this escalation of violence. The President of the French Republic, Mr. Sarkozy, visited the region on 5 January with the European troika to meet with various actors. One week ago, the Security Council, meeting at the ministerial level under the French presidency, adopted resolution 1860 (2009), calling for an immediate, durable and fully respected ceasefire — including an end to the rocket attacks — leading to the full withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza. The Council has supported the Egyptian initiative to prevent trafficking in weapons and ammunition and ensure the permanent reopening of border crossings into Gaza, in order to put an end to the worsening humanitarian and economic situation. On Tuesday morning, the Security Council held consultations to hear what the Secretary-General had to

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say before leaving for the region. Mr. Ban Ki-moon received the full support of Council members in order to promote the implementation of resolution 1860 (2009) through contacts on the ground. This very morning, the Council held consultations on the latest developments in the situation in Gaza.

Under the French presidency, the Security Council is active, remains seized of the issue and is making clear statements. In our work, we must be committed to complying with the letter of Article 12 of the Charter of the United Nations. Above all, our common goal must be to support the immediate implementation of resolution 1860 (2009) in all its provisions. Let us be clear. The absolute priority for France is an immediate halt to the violence in order to put an end to the suffering of all civilian populations.

This is an urgent matter. The efforts of the international community should all be aimed to that end. We express the hope that this emergency special session will strictly follow this approach and will bring full support to the complete implementation of resolution 1860 (2009), particularly through completion of current diplomatic efforts on the ground, especially the French-Egyptian plan on which the parties are working. It is also urgent to support the international efforts to improve the humanitarian and economic situation in Gaza, as resolution 1860 (2009) demands, by supporting the activities of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East and of recognized impartial humanitarian players.

When the weapons fall silent and the bases for a lasting ceasefire have been established, we must relaunch the Annapolis peace process begun more than a year ago. There is no alternative to a resumption of negotiations to create a viable, independent and democratic Palestinian State living in peace alongside Israel within safe and recognized borders. Resolution 1850 (2008) referred to the irreversible nature of that process. That peace should be based on the principle of land for peace, the resolutions of the Security Council and the Arab Peace Initiative, which represents a vital basis for a comprehensive and lasting solution in the Middle East.

The Acting President: I now give the floor to the Permanent Representative of Uganda, who will make a statement on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

Mr. Butagira (Uganda): I have the honour to speak today on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) group in New York.

The OIC welcomes and supports the resumption today of this tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly on the illegal Israeli actions in occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory to discuss Israel's aggression in Gaza.

An emergency OIC Ministerial Executive Committee meeting held in Jeddah on 3 January 2009 called for the convening of a meeting of the General Assembly under the "Uniting for Peace" principle. This meeting of the General Assembly today is therefore a clear reflection of the seriousness with which the international community takes the tragic situation in Gaza and the need to find an immediate and sustainable solution.

The grave and worsening humanitarian crisis in Gaza as a result of Israeli actions is unacceptable. Civilians have borne the brunt of the attacks, which have caused hundreds of casualties, left thousands injured and wreaked massive destruction on property and civic facilities.

The violence in Gaza has claimed over 1,000 Palestinian lives and is now in its twentieth day. Today, the United Nations compound in Gaza was shelled again. Yesterday, we heard from the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, who stated that

> "United Nations schools sheltering displaced persons have been hit; humanitarian workers have been killed and ambulances hit; the sick and wounded have been left trapped and unassisted; and up to 100,000 people have been displaced from their homes" (*S/PV.6066, p. 3*).

And he continued,

> "[t]he situation for the civilian population of Gaza is terrifying, and its psychological impact is felt particularly by children and their parents, who feel helpless and unable to protect them" (*ibid.*).

We condemn Israeli actions in Gaza, which are excessive. They must stop. The effect of the current hostilities is the further destabilization of the situation in the occupied territories and in the wider Middle

East. The violence is also a serious threat to the Middle East peace process.

Israel must end its military operation immediately and open all border crossings to ensure unfettered access for the delivery of humanitarian supplies into Gaza. It is necessary to have immediate humanitarian access into Gaza to provide relief for and evacuation of the wounded, but this access cannot be guaranteed as long as Israeli military operations are ongoing.

Last week, the OIC welcomed the adoption by the Security Council of resolution 1860 (2009) on the Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip. Although the resolution came late and did not address some of the fundamental issues related to the Israeli-Palestinian question, it represented a step in the right direction. We therefore call for the immediate and full implementation of the resolution to ensure that all concerned parties abide by it and that Israel demonstrates its commitment to stopping its aggression, withdrawing from the Gaza Strip, lifting the siege imposed on Gaza, opening the border crossings and allowing humanitarian assistance to cross into Gaza.

The Organization of the Islamic Conference has undertaken an emergency humanitarian assistance campaign launched by the OIC Secretary General with the objective of catering to the minimum basic humanitarian needs of the population in the Gaza Strip. On Wednesday, 14 January 2009, an OIC convoy delivered relief aid to the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip through the Rafah crossing. The OIC aid convoy included 300 tons of medicine, medical equipment and food supplies.

We thank the United Nations, its Member States and civil society institutions that have provided the people of Gaza with support in these difficult times. We call on them all to give further support because the humanitarian needs in Gaza are acute. We also pay tribute to all the humanitarian workers in Gaza who are continuing to carry out their work amid the terrible violence.

Finally, I wish to reiterate that the time has come for the violence to stop and for an immediate resumption of the peace process to deal with the question of Palestine in a comprehensive way in order to ensure a lasting and just peace in the Middle East, encompassing a two-State solution as called for in relevant Security Council resolutions.

Mr. Natalegawa (Indonesia): It is, of course, customary to begin by expressing appreciation for the convening of a meeting — in the present instance, the resumed tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly. Indeed, my delegation is particularly appreciative, since Indonesia has been one of the chief proponents of calling this meeting and therefore is solidly behind its convening.

Yet we are deeply saddened by the circumstances that require such an emergency session, namely, the worsening of the plight of innocent Palestinian civilians in the Gaza Strip brought about by Israel's military actions and its continued stubborn refusal to heed international calls to bring its military operations to an end.

The international community's total rejection of the violence now permeating the Gaza Strip as a result of Israeli actions must be made loud and clear through all appropriate avenues within the United Nations system, not least by our General Assembly.

For some three weeks now, the Israeli military operations against Palestinians in the Gaza Strip have rightly held the attention of the Security Council, the organ entrusted with the primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. Indeed, after some delay, the Security Council took action by adopting resolution 1860 (2009) on 8 January 2009. We draw some encouragement from that decision, mindful at all times, however, of the need to ensure that the resolution be swiftly implemented.

Alas, one week later, the carnage continues unabated. Indeed, only earlier today, a compound belonging to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) was shelled, adding to the catalogue of atrocities committed by Israel.

Indonesia is outraged by the horrific consequences of Israel's actions. Indonesia once again condemns, in the strongest manner possible, Israeli military attacks against Palestinians in the occupied Gaza Strip, in contravention of international humanitarian and human rights law. The General Assembly is mandated by the Charter to call attention to situations which are likely to endanger international peace and security. Nowhere is that more true than in respect of the situation in the Middle East, which has the question of Palestine at its heart.

Today offers an opportunity for the wider membership of the United Nations to express its views on the grave situation in the Gaza Strip. We must not allow silence on the part of the General Assembly to be wrongly construed as acquiescence to the ongoing carnage caused by Israel. The international community cannot — and, indeed, must not — stand idly by as hundreds of innocent civilians, including women and children, fall victim to Israeli atrocities.

As the death toll mounts, it is clear that every moment counts. There must be urgent efforts to ensure the protection and safety of innocent civilians. In addition, we must not forget those who have perished. The perpetrators of these heinous crimes, which are in violation of international humanitarian and human rights law, must be held accountable.

As a member of the Human Rights Council, Indonesia thus welcomes the Council's adoption of a resolution on 12 January 2009, in which it decided, inter alia, to dispatch an independent international fact-finding mission to investigate all violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law by Israel as the occupying Power.

The continuing violence in the Gaza Strip has greatly worsened the already dire humanitarian situation caused by more than 18 months of Israeli closures. Combined with the incessant military attacks, this policy of the illegal blockade and closure of the Gaza Strip constitutes nothing less than the collective punishment of an entire people. The number of child victims — more than 300 killed and in excess of 1,500 injured — is harrowing. Innocent civilians are trapped, unable to flee the fighting and find refuge.

Israel must immediately and permanently lift the closures and ensure unhindered and safe access for humanitarian aid and other essential supplies to the civilian population in the Gaza Strip. It must also ensure the safe passage of civilian persons and humanitarian personnel into and out of the Gaza Strip, in accordance with international humanitarian law.

Worse still, Israel has continued its callous practice of targeting humanitarian convoys. The shelling of the UNRWA compound illustrates that, despite repeated assurances, Israel has continued to display utter disregard for humanitarian principles. Indonesia would like to pay tribute to the dedication and sacrifices of humanitarian personnel. We must lend the fullest possible support to their courageous efforts.

With every passing day, we bear witness to yet more deaths and destruction. The price of delay is clearly immeasurable. The Assembly must urgently issue a clarion call: end the fighting, reject the logic of force and promote dialogue and negotiations as the only path towards a just and sustainable peace.

In that connection, Indonesia deems it important that the General Assembly assert its role, not least as the conscience of the international community, and in order to add value to the various ongoing diplomatic efforts to bring the fighting to an end. We believe that the Assembly's focus should be on pushing for prompt and immediate action to, once again, bring the fighting to an end. In that connection, Indonesia would like to pay tribute in particular to the strong efforts of the Secretary-General, as well as those of the countries in the region, individually or collectively, through the League of Arab States.

The Charter of the United Nations clearly outlines that maintaining peace and security is one of the purposes of the Organization. The General Assembly has a historic responsibility with regard to the question of Palestine and the situation in the Middle East. My delegation therefore welcomes the intention of the President of the General Assembly to facilitate a formal outcome to our present deliberations. Of course, we must reaffirm the importance of the implementation of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009). However, we must do more than that. We must build on the resolution, in keeping with the various concerns expressed during this emergency special session of the General Assembly.

From Indonesia's perspective, at least two issues stand out: first, the need to urge the international community — including countries in the region — to redouble their efforts to ensure the full implementation of resolution 1860 (2009); and, secondly, a request that the Secretary-General carry out an immediate investigation into the human rights violations and the destruction of Palestinian infrastructure caused by the Israeli military actions.

At this critical juncture, it is incumbent on the General Assembly to respond collectively and urgently in order to bring the fighting to an end and to achieve a just, comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East based on all relevant Security Council resolutions, including resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973), 1397 (2002) and 1515 (2003), the Madrid terms of reference

and the principle of land for peace. Indonesia, for its part, is committed to working earnestly to attain that objective.

Mr. Malhotra (India): We are meeting today on the margins of a serious crisis in West Asia. It is a crisis that has an impact on stability in the region and, beyond, in the world at large. We deeply regret the loss of all civilian lives; every innocent life lost is one too many. It is important that there be an end to the vicious circle of violence and counter-violence.

Speaking on the situation in Gaza, the Prime Minister of India, Mr. Manmohan Singh, expressed concern at the rise in tensions in the region as a result of the attack on Gaza, which has led to the needless loss of the lives of so many innocent men, women and children. He said:

> "India has strongly condemned these incidents, and it is our hope that the international community will get together and help restore peace in the region as soon as possible. I wish to reiterate our unstinted and unwavering support for the just Palestinian cause."

We support ongoing initiatives — including that of the Secretary-General — for an immediate, durable and fully respected ceasefire, as called for in Security Council resolution 1860 (2009), with which all parties should comply.

The President took the Chair.

Mr. President, in your circular letter of 7 January 2009, you specifically asked the Assembly to consider the ongoing humanitarian situation. The deteriorating situation in Gaza has drawn the attention of the Government of India, and the plight of the population has become heart-rending. The daily timetable of a three-hour ceasefire does not appear to be producing any favourable changes in the situation. The situation on the energy front appears extremely grim, as nearly three fourths of the Gaza population is now without any electricity, and, with no fuel oil available, the prospects appear even more serious. The situation on the food front in Gaza is no better; some 750,000 people are without access to food. We express serious concern at the plight of the million and a half Gazan civilians living in a permanent state of fright. There is therefore an urgent need for assured humanitarian access with a view to the provision of essential commodities in Gaza.

Given the scale of the humanitarian disaster unfolding in Gaza and the escalating number of civilian victims, India, in response to the Flash Appeal made recently by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, is extending $1 million in assistance for the Agency's use to provide shelter, cash assistance and essential household items to the affected families in Gaza. India has also announced a grant of $10 million as budgetary support for the Palestinian National Authority, in addition to $10 million in project assistance.

In parallel to all that, we must urgently reinforce our collective message that all actions that run counter to the commitments of the parties under the Road Map must cease. India remains steadfastly in support of a political solution based on the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative. It is important to move towards the early creation of an independent, sovereign and viable State of Palestine, living side by side with Israel within secure and internationally recognized borders.

India wants to see the creation of an environment for the earliest possible resumption of dialogue under the peace process and seeks an immediate end to the suffering of the people of Gaza.

Ms. Shalev (Israel): I would like to stress that my comments are without prejudice to our clear position of principle that the convening of this emergency special session violates the fundamental conditions of the "Uniting for Peace" procedure and the United Nations Charter.

The emergency special session is taking place as the Security Council is actively addressing the situation in southern Israel and the Gaza Strip. Only last week, the Security Council adopted resolution 1860 (2009), which seeks to promote an end to the current violence. As we speak, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is visiting our region, with the endorsement of the Security Council, with a view to facilitating a solution to the conflict.

Article 12 of the Charter of the United Nations states that

> "while the Security Council is exercising in respect of any dispute or situation the functions assigned to it in the present Charter, the General Assembly shall not make any recommendation with regard to that dispute or situation unless the Security Council so requests".

That being the case, what is the real purpose of convening this emergency special session?

Furthermore, General Assembly resolution 377 (V) states that the emergency special sessions of the General Assembly are designed to act only when the Security Council, "because of lack of unanimity of the permanent members, fails to exercise its primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security". That means in case of veto only. Since there was no veto on this matter, and since the Security Council remains actively seized of this issue, the convening of this meeting of the General Assembly is one that defies its own rules.

That is not the only inherent defect of this meeting. Among other things, the subject under discussion is far removed from the issue that gave rise to the never-ending tenth emergency special session. The convening of this meeting under the guise of the tenth emergency special session is therefore deceitful and contrary to established procedure and honest common sense.

Yet in today's meeting, the Assembly is trampling not only on its own procedural requirements, but also on the very principles it has committed itself to uphold. In its resolution 63/129 on measures to eliminate international terrorism, this Assembly reiterated its strong condemnation of all acts, methods and practices of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations. But where was this Assembly's condemnation of the Hamas' terrorist attacks, its deliberate targeting of schools and hospitals and the eight years in which the residents of southern Israel have had to live their lives within 15 seconds' reach of bunkers to protect them from terrorist rockets and missiles? Where is the Assembly's strong condemnation of the incidents of Katyusha rockets fired from Lebanon on a nursing home in Nahariya and on Kiryat Shmona in the North of Israel just last week?

In the aforementioned resolution, the Assembly reiterated its call upon States to refrain from "financing, encouraging, providing training for or otherwise supporting terrorist activities". Where, then, is the condemnation of Iran, which manufactured many of the missiles smuggled into Gaza during the period of the so-called calm and trained the terrorists to fire them on Israeli schools and kindergartens? Where is the condemnation of Syria, which continues to host terrorist headquarters in Damascus and to facilitate the flow of weapons and missiles across its border to Hizbullah?

In resolution 63/138 on the safety and security of humanitarian personnel and protection of United Nations personnel, the General Assembly stressed the importance of "fully respecting the obligations relating to the use of vehicles and premises of humanitarian personnel" (*resolution 63/138, twelfth preambular paragraph*) and the United Nations. Where, then, is its condemnation of Hamas and other terrorist groups for deliberately endangering civilians by hiding stockpiles of weapons and missiles inside hospitals and firing them from in and around United Nations schools?

In resolution 58/150 on assistance to unaccompanied refugee minors, this Assembly condemned

> "all acts of exploitation of unaccompanied refugee minors, including their use as soldiers or human shields in armed conflict and their forced recruitment into military forces, and any other acts that endanger their safety and personal security" (*resolution 58/150, para. 8*).

Why, then, is this Assembly silent as Hamas launches attacks from densely populated homes and mosques while it cowers behind the Palestinian population as human shields?

In resolution 63/171 on combating defamation of religions, this Assembly expressed its deep concern at programmes and agendas pursued by extremist organizations and groups aimed at the defamation of religions and incitement to religious hatred. Where, then, is the deep concern of this Assembly at the toxic religious incitement and indoctrination of Palestinian children and the brutal persecution of Christians in Gaza? Where is rejection of the Hamas Covenant, which states: "No war takes place anywhere in the world without [the Jews] behind the scenes having a hand in it [as it is written in the Koran] 'Whenever they fan the flames of war, Allah will extinguish them'."

This Assembly is trampling on its own procedures and principles. But it is also trampling on the hopes of millions of people for a better future, for this meeting is being watched. It is being watched by the Hamas terrorist organization, which sees that there are dark corners of the international community in which disdain for human values will not deprive

Hamas of legitimacy. It is being watched by Al-Qaida and other terrorist groups around the world, who are learning that the resolve of the international community to confront terrorists is beginning to crack. They are learning that hiding behind civilians in the course of armed conflict, bringing death and injury upon such civilians, is indeed cowardly, but can be effective and serve their purpose. It is being watched by Iran, the sponsor of terror, for which it confirms that its war of terror by proxy against humanity may bring results. It is being watched by over 1 million Israeli civilians, who live under the threat of Hamas rockets and mortar shells.

Sadly, countless human tragedies and immeasurable human suffering exist around the world. Victims of the most severe violations of the most basic rights — in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Sudan, North Korea, Afghanistan, Somalia, Iran, Myanmar, Saudi Arabia, Zimbabwe and elsewhere — cry out for their plight to be heard and for their suffering to be redressed by the international community.

This meeting is being watched by those millions of victims. It is being watched by those who see that their suffering will never reach the international stage because the General Assembly is meeting today in a cynical, hateful and politicized fashion to delegitimize Israel's fundamental right to defend its citizens. From this meeting, all such victims can only draw despair.

The President: I thank the representative of Israel and reject her calling the General Assembly hateful and cynical. Those may be realities in our world today, but we must look elsewhere.

Mr. Abdelaziz (Egypt) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me to begin with a call for calm and reason in the debate on the issue under discussion.

My delegation would like to express Egypt's appreciation for the kind initiative of the President to reconvene the tenth emergency special session, on the illegal Israeli actions in the occupied Palestinian territory, in response to several demands put forth by leaders and heads of State from various geographical and political groups, in particular the Non-Aligned Movement, based upon full respect for all procedures. I would also like to express our support for the statements made by the representatives of Morocco, on behalf of the Arab Group, Cuba, on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, and Uganda, on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference. I also wish to thank the Secretary-General for his swift and vigorous efforts from the first day of the crisis and for his current visit to the Middle East, which began in Egypt, to work for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) and the achievement of a ceasefire as soon as possible.

The resumption of the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly is taking place at a dangerous time, when the Gaza Strip is continuing to endure Israeli acts of aggression against the Palestinian people despite the adoption of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009), which calls on both the Israelis and the Palestinians to stop the ongoing humanitarian tragedy. The resolution response to some of the demands of the Arab Ministerial Council, including calling for an immediate and durable ceasefire leading to the full withdrawal of Israeli forces, the lifting of the siege and the opening of border crossings to allow for the free flow of humanitarian and economic assistance. The resolution also calls for the alleviation of the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip and the establishment of a mechanism for the protection of Palestinian civilians and to monitor the implementation of the ceasefire by both parties and facilitate movement through the border crossings. The resolution also expresses support for many international and regional initiatives aimed at achieving those objectives, first and foremost the Egyptian initiative aiming at restoring calm and relaunching a credible and serious peace process in the Middle East.

The resumed tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly is taking place as Egypt continues its efforts to implement the initiative launched by President Hosni Mubarak and is consistent with Security Council resolution 1860 (2009). Egypt is also continuing to shoulder its historic responsibility towards the peace process and the fraternal Palestinian people. Moreover, Egypt is working to achieve the necessary complementarity between international and regional efforts aimed at halting the bloodshed in the Gaza Strip and putting in place the necessary arrangements and guarantees to implement Security Council resolution 1860 (2009), which welcomed the Egyptian initiative and the other Egyptian efforts.

The Egyptian initiative has sought to quickly and seriously address the severe humanitarian situation suffered by civilians on the ground by working on three main fronts. First, we are working to secure an

agreement by Israel and the Palestinian factions on an immediate ceasefire for a specified period to allow for the opening of safe corridors for humanitarian assistance and to allow time to pursue efforts to achieve a comprehensive and permanent ceasefire. Secondly, we are calling on both the Israeli and Palestinian parties to meet immediately to conclude arrangements and guarantees aimed at preventing the recurrence of an escalation of hostilities and at addressing the causes of the conflict. Thirdly, we are calling on the Palestinian Authority and all Palestinian factions to respond positively to efforts aimed at achieving Palestinian reconciliation under the auspices of Egypt. Egypt is also continuing its in-depth negotiations with both the Israeli and Palestinian sides — with the support and endorsement of a large number of States and parties from the region, as well as the Quartet — in order to quickly begin the implementation of Egypt's initiative and to end the bloodshed and break the vicious cycle of violence and military operations.

From the first day that the Arab Group brought the Israeli military operations in the Gaza Strip to the attention of the Security Council, the Council has expressed the clear will of the international community by demanding a halt to aggression in a press release that also called unanimously for a ceasefire. The Security Council also reiterated that will in resolution 1860 (2009), which it adopted by 14 votes in favour, with 1 abstention. The abstaining member, the United States, in an explanation of its vote by the Secretary of State, clearly emphasized its commitment to the resolution and its support for an immediate ceasefire and the ongoing regional efforts towards that end.

We welcomed the adoption of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009), despite the fact that it meets only a minimum of the Arab demands. We believe it was an important step towards the balanced implementation of numerous mutual commitments, including the declaration of an immediate ceasefire by both sides. Today we renew, from this rostrum, our full support for resolution 1860 (2009) and our call for its implementation. We also call for urgent efforts to achieve an immediate halt to the violence and military activities by both sides and the permanent reopening of border crossings in accordance with the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access between the Palestinian Authority and the Government of Israel. We also call for immediate access for all forms of humanitarian and economic assistance to Gaza, in order to maintain the calm and to prevent an escalation of the current situation. Egypt also calls for immediate efforts at reconstruction and for moving towards a comprehensive and credible peace process based on the vision of two States, the relevant United Nations resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002.

Arab and international frustration is mounting daily as thousands of Palestinians fall victim to the massacre carried out by the Israeli war machine. In addition, the Security Council continues to be paralysed, and is therefore incapable of putting an end to the killing of innocent civilians and the destruction of infrastructure in the Gaza Strip. It has also been incapable of providing the necessary protection to United Nations facilities in Gaza, in particular the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).

Israel is continuing to shell United Nations premises, specifically UNRWA and the humanitarian compound — just as it previously shelled the UNRWA school, Al-Quds hospital, a media centre and other infrastructure. All of those acts of aggression illustrate Israel's defiance of the international Organization and its collective will. Therefore, all of us in the United Nations, including the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Secretary-General, must work together to guarantee the full and faithful implementation of all the provisions of resolution 1860 (2009) in order to preserve the credibility of the Organization, strengthen its role in protecting the Palestinian people and bring pressure to bear on Israel to cease forthwith its violation of international law and international humanitarian law and to stop defying the will of the international community.

The pretext of legitimate self-defence does not justify Israel's use of excessive and disproportionate military force — let alone internationally banned weapons — against Palestinian civilians, which it has done, particularly in the light of the provisions of international law and international humanitarian law regarding the need to safeguard civilians in times of war. It also does not justify the killing of children in schools run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East; it does not justify bombing reporters and media centres in an attempt to prevent them from transmitting the real picture of Israel's brutal actions in Gaza; nor does it

justify attacking hospitals so that they cannot provide basic services to the injured.

Therefore, in the light of the international consensus on giving life to the principle of the responsibility to protect, as set forth in paragraphs 138 and 139 of the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document, the concept should be extended to include Palestinian civilians under occupation. In accordance with resolution 1860 (2009), we request the establishment of an international force to protect the Palestinian people in Gaza, monitor the ceasefire on both sides and facilitate movement through border crossings, which should complement the Human Rights Council's resolution of 12 January 2009 calling for an immediate and just investigation of the international crimes that have been committed and for their perpetrators to be prosecuted.

Accordingly, we call on the General Assembly to send a clear and strong message of its support for resolution 1860 (2009). We also request that a draft resolution be submitted by the President of the General Assembly that reflects the support of all Member States for the resolution and for efforts to implement it, as well as the full compliance of both parties and Member States with its provisions. We fully trust that the General Assembly will shoulder its responsibility and adopt the draft resolution by consensus.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that Egypt, which opened the door to peace in the Middle East and has sponsored the Palestinian cause from the very beginning, will continue to support the Palestinian people's struggle to overcome their predicament and to counter the grave challenges facing them internally and externally, which include achieving the primary goal of Palestinian reconciliation and agreeing on a clear political horizon that can contribute to the success of international and regional efforts to stop the aggression. This approach aims at creating the appropriate conditions for advancing the peace process, leading to the establishment of an independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, on the West Bank and in the territory of the Gaza Strip, which in their entirety constitute the land of the independent, indivisible Palestinian State. One people — the Palestinian people — will live on this land with their various factions of all political, ideological and conceptual stripes. We fully trust that the international community represented here will support our efforts and the efforts of the Security Council and other parties active in the pursuit and achievement of this goal.

In this context, Egypt supports the pivotal role played by the United Nations, particularly its Secretary-General, and the international Quartet. This role gives our work its international character and provides an effective link between our activities at the United Nations and those of the Quartet in addressing the situation on the ground and in coordinating with the parties themselves. We thus call for the support of our colleagues in the General Assembly as we continue to work towards the ultimate achievement of just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

Mr. Ilkin (Turkey): As we enter the twentieth day of Israeli operations in Gaza, the death toll — now over 1,000, including a great number of women and children — continues to rise. Entire families have perished in the violence. For the people of Gaza, the borders are closed and there is no place to go. Even United Nations headquarters and buildings are not spared from attacks, as we have seen today.

No one can accept such a siege. No one can tolerate such an action, of which civilians take the brunt and are the victims. We deeply regret the ongoing human tragedy in Gaza. At the very least, there should be a basic consideration for these suffering victims because there is an obligation to protect civilians and to respect the sanctity of life.

We reiterate our urgent appeal to stop the bloodshed and to halt all military activities. We invite the parties to implement Security Council resolution 1860 (2009), which calls for an immediate ceasefire and the full withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza, without further delay. There is no time to lose. The longer the Israeli military operation continues, the greater the number of innocent lives that will be in jeopardy.

The situation in Gaza has now become a humanitarian catastrophe. Unimpeded access for humanitarian assistance throughout Gaza, as well as the sustained and regular flow of goods to the people of Gaza, as set forth in resolution 1860 (2009), are a must. The blockade of Gaza should be lifted in all its aspects.

That having been said, of course, Israel has a right to live in security. We by no means condone the continued rocket attacks launched against civilian

targets in Israel. However, we call on Israel to reconsider its policies, which cannot deliver the sense of security it seeks. Excessive use of force and punitive measures that harm the well-being of the entire population are not the way towards permanent peace. It should not be forgotten that the Palestinians who are being bombed and attacked today will be Israel's neighbours forever.

The tragedy in Gaza, if not stopped immediately, will increasingly continue to fuel the flames of hatred and enmity in the region. That is a very dangerous trend which has the potential of poisoning not only the present but future generations as well.

With these thoughts in mind, we continue our efforts and contacts at all levels in order to help to bring an end to this conflict. Our Prime Minister's special representative is now in the region and involved in intense shuttle diplomacy. We sincerely hope that all the endeavours undertaken by different players promptly yield positive results. In the meantime, we are also continuing our massive humanitarian relief efforts for the people of Gaza in order to alleviate their suffering as much as we can.

We also underline the importance of national reconciliation among Palestinians, which, we believe, is crucial not only for the national unity and integrity of Palestine, but also for the prospect of permanent peace and stability in the region.

Resolution 1860 (2009) has provided an opportunity to end the hostilities in Gaza. This opportunity must be seized. The calm in the region must be restored so that we can once again start addressing the urgent need to achieve a viable and comprehensive peace through all tracks of the Middle East peace process.

Mr. Alsaidi (Yemen) (*spoke in Arabic*): Mr. President, first of all, allow me to thank you for convening this emergency special session. This meeting is extremely important because of the tragedy that the Palestinian people are facing in Gaza.

My country wishes to align itself with the statements made by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Group of Arab States, by the representative of Uganda on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference and by the representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

As we meet here today, the defenceless Palestinian population in Gaza is enduring a savage attack launched 20 days ago by Israel, the occupying Power. Despite the fact that that barbaric attack has claimed the lives of more than 1,000 Palestinians and injured thousands more, the Israeli authorities are stepping up their military operations and say that they will stop only after their objectives have been attained. It is a stunning paradox that this outrageous war, declared by Israel against a people who have been under occupation for more than four decades, is being justified as legitimate self-defence. How can the occupier continue to invoke the right to self-defence when the occupation is itself an aggression?

Whatever the status of the Israeli army's redeployment, no one — not even those who support Tel Aviv — can deny that Israel has total control over Gaza's land and sea borders as well as its airspace. Therefore, one can say that Gaza is still under Israeli occupation. Those who deny that fact read international law from a political perspective. Such a reading is not only illogical but runs counter to the norms of international law itself. How can the inhuman practices of imposing a deadly blockade against families and children and denying them access to food, medicine and electricity be justified as self-defence? Has the concept of self-defence changed overnight? Or has it perhaps been reinterpreted in order to conceal Israel's crimes? Whoever occupies another's territory, establishes settlements there and changes facts on the ground cannot claim that those acts are carried out in self-defence, because they violate international law and the Fourth Geneva Convention. Indeed, those who are fighting against the occupier and its policies of land-grabbing, expansion and annexation are the ones defending themselves. Those who are fighting against the occupier, in accordance with the rules of international law, are not terrorists but freedom fighters, despite the fact that some confuse the legitimate fight against an occupier with terrorism.

We in Yemen are convinced that the tragedy of the Palestinian people will come to an end only when the international community shoulders its responsibilities by ending Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and ensuring its withdrawal from all other Arab territories. What is now occurring in occupied Gaza and elsewhere is a barbaric aggression aimed at imposing a fait accompli that will force the Palestinians to flee their

homes, farms and lands to make room for Jewish settlers.

Following the Security Council's adoption of resolution 1860 (2009), Israel has, as usual, ignored the resolution and continued its aggression against the Palestinian people in Gaza. The Council must therefore compel Israel to comply with that resolution. We stress that the Council and the international community as a whole must take the following measures if they wish to re-establish their authority with regard to the Arab-Israeli conflict.

First, they must condemn the ongoing Israeli aggression. Secondly, they must impose an immediate, unequivocal and unconditional ceasefire to prevent Israel from attaining its objective of destroying all infrastructure in Gaza. Thirdly, they must state explicitly that all crossing points into Gaza must be opened so that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, other humanitarian organizations and the international community as a whole can ensure the provision of humanitarian assistance and supplies to the besieged people of Gaza. Fourthly, they must compel Israel, the occupying Power, to honour its commitments under the Fourth Geneva Convention of 12 August 1949, which forbids an occupier from changing facts on the ground in the occupied territory. Fifthly, they must ensure that Israel puts an end to the settlements on the Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and other occupied Arab lands, and dismantles those already established. Sixthly, they must compel Israel to comply with the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice by dismantling the expansionist wall separating Palestinians from one another, farmers from their lands, imams from their mosques and the sick from hospitals.

We have no doubt that what we are demanding is not impossible to fulfil and that the Security Council could do all those things if its members had the requisite political will. We are also convinced that the ongoing Israeli aggression has offended the human conscience. Forcing Israel to comply with the international will and the norms of international law is a prerequisite for the achievement of peace and stability in the Middle East, the cradle of monotheistic religions, and human civilizations.

Mr. Sin Son Ho (Democratic People's Republic of Korea): Allow me, first of all, to express my delegation's appreciation to you, Mr. President, for having convened this very important and timely meeting.

The delegation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea strongly condemns the recent Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip of Palestine as a wanton violation of international law and the Charter of the United Nations and an open provocation to the Middle East peace process. At this very moment, Israeli armed forces are mercilessly killing innocent Palestinian civilians and destroying houses, public buildings and schools at random. Those are clearly acts of State terrorism and crimes against humanity.

What cannot be overlooked in this regard is the fact that the Israeli atrocities are backed by the United States of America. The entire world is now denouncing Israeli aggression and calling for an immediate end to all of Israel's military actions. However, to our regret, the United States of America alone is taking sides with Israel, even justifying Israeli actions to obstruct peace. That proves once again that the peace breaker and the worst human rights violator in the world is none other than the United States of America.

It is the legitimate right of the Palestinian people to recover their occupied territory and to build an independent sovereign State. It is therefore a just cause for them to fight to achieve their goal. The Government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea extends its full support and solidarity to the Palestinian people in their struggle to expel the Israeli aggressors from their own territory and to regain their legitimate rights, including the right to self-determination. Israel should immediately stop all its military actions and withdraw its aggressive forces from Gaza Strip.

Finally, I am obliged, and it is my duty, to respond to the statement made by the Israeli representative. The representative of Israel must be aware that this is a special meeting pertaining to her country's operations against innocent Palestinian people. This is not a special meeting to raise questions about any other country, including my country. My delegation would like to advise the representative of Israel to be more humble, to be more innocent and to be more sincere about the purpose of this meeting. My delegation categorically rejects her statement, which is not acceptable at all.

Mr. Sangqu (South Africa): We welcome the holding of this emergency meeting and are pleased at

your initiative, Mr. President. We also wish to associate ourselves with the statement delivered by the representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

There has been a gross exacerbation of violence over the past few weeks in Gaza and southern Israel. So many innocent people have been killed and injured that it is imperative for the Assembly to collectively and publicly voice its condemnation of the attacks and demand that both sides immediately cease their military attacks and violence.

Security Council resolution 1860 (2009), which was adopted by the Council a week ago, called for, in paragraph 1, "an immediate, durable and fully respected ceasefire, leading to the full withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza". It further called, in paragraph 2, for "the unimpeded provision and distribution throughout Gaza of humanitarian assistance, including of food, fuel and medical treatment".

We are extremely disappointed that the resolution has not yet been implemented. We urge all parties to fully respect Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) and to immediately implement its provisions. Should there be no compliance with the resolution, we would expect the Security Council to take the appropriate measures within its Charter-based mandate to implement its decisions. We believe that the immediate next step for the Security Council is to strengthen resolution 1860 (2009) by demanding that a ceasefire, the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Gaza and the easing of the blockade by opening borders should be done immediately and simultaneously.

The South African Government has expressed its view that Israeli air strikes are a violation of international humanitarian law and human rights law. The South African Government has called on the Israeli Government to stop the military onslaught in Gaza and to immediately and unconditionally withdraw its forces.

These Israeli air strikes also represent an excessive and disproportionate use of force by Israel. The more than 1,000 deaths, including those of approximately 350 children, and the further thousands of injuries, are unjustifiable. We join the Secretary-General in reiterating Israel's obligation to uphold international humanitarian and human rights law and condemn its excessive use of force leading to the killing, maiming and injuring of civilians.

In that regard, we do not believe that Israel's right to self-defence entitles it to violate the rights of innocent civilians, particularly those civilians who have been living under 40 years of illegal occupation. Israel cannot expect security for its people or political normalcy as long as it occupies Palestinian lands and continues its attempt to impose its permanent rule over the Palestinians by military force.

My delegation is particularly concerned about the devastating humanitarian consequences of the occupation, the siege and the continuing attacks into Gaza. That situation has been made worse by the escalating military attacks, which have also targeted and killed United Nations humanitarian workers. Continued attacks on the United Nations, its staff and other humanitarian agencies cannot be tolerated. We are concerned about the fact that, due to those attacks, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East has suspended its activities until the Israeli authorities guarantee its safety and security. The International Committee of the Red Cross has issued a statement citing examples of where the Israeli military has failed to meet its obligations under international humanitarian law by hindering access. We join the Secretary-General in calling for full and unhindered humanitarian access to allow aid workers to operate in safety to reach communities in need.

South Africa's President Motlanthe has reiterated that violence and counter-violence will not advance the cause of either Israelis or Palestinians, and thus neither strength nor efforts must be spared by the Palestinians and the Israelis to find an amicable solution based on two States: an independent Palestinian State coexisting side by side with an Israeli State, each living within secure borders.

South Africa calls upon the United Nations family to stand together in condemning the escalation of violence. The General Assembly, the most democratic and representative body, should demand an immediate ceasefire, the immediate withdrawal of Israeli troops from Gaza, the immediate opening of Gaza's borders to end the inhumane siege and the provision of immediate and unimpeded humanitarian assistance. The international community has a responsibility to use all means possible to stop the

violence that is leading to the unacceptable humanitarian crisis in the region. To do less would again call into question the credibility of the Organization in addressing the loss of innocent lives in the Middle East.

Mr. Khazaee (Islamic Republic of Iran): At the outset, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to you, Mr. President, for your decision to give a positive response to the requests of numerous Member States to resume the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly. We are confident that, under your wise and brave leadership, the session will be guided towards a productive outcome.

The Islamic Republic of Iran believes that, in considering the Zionist regime's criminal acts in the occupied Palestinian territory, the highest priority should be accorded to the act of illegitimate, forceful and unlawful occupation of that territory, which serves as the first cause of decades of that regime's criminal acts in Palestine and in the region. The catastrophic situation in the occupied Palestinian territory, especially the ongoing tragedy in the Gaza Strip that has resulted from the abhorrent carnage and the crimes against humanity perpetrated by the Israeli regime, is a clear manifestation of a cold-blooded massacre of innocent civilians, most of them women and children. It is clear now that the 1.5 million starved and besieged Palestinian inhabitants of the Gaza Strip — the world's largest concentration camp, created by the Israeli occupying Power — are being forced to continue to collectively pay for democratically electing their Government.

The massacre currently taking place in the Gaza Strip is a matter of urgent and extreme concern to the Iranian people, its Government and the whole world. The entire population of Gaza, which has been under a crippling blockade, starved and deprived of the most basic supplies for the past 18 months, has now been strangulated and slaughtered for the twentieth consecutive day by a barbaric occupying regime that knows nothing about humanity or respect for human beings. Since that regime's thirst for blood has not been quenched by targeting every human being, every house and every infrastructure in the Gaza Strip, it has resorted to unimaginable criminal acts, such as the bombardment of innocent children and women taking shelter in United Nations-declared safe buildings and killing and injuring United Nations humanitarian personnel and local paramedics. It is evident that, once again, by committing those barbaric crimes, the Israeli regime has challenged the credibility of the international community and the civilized world and has undermined the most basic values for which the civilized world stands.

Yet another example of the Israeli regime's contempt for the United Nations and for the values for which the Organization stands was in evidence when the main United Nations compound in Gaza was left in flames today after being struck by Israeli shells containing white phosphorous. That shows disrespect for United Nations officials as well, as the attack came as the Secretary-General was in the occupied territories. That is a crime that, along with other Israeli crimes, should not go unpunished. We strongly condemn it and believe that it and other Israeli attacks on United Nations personnel and premises require urgent action by the United Nations. We are therefore of the view that that regime is not qualified to be a Member of this Organization.

We firmly believe that the world community should take urgent measures in unison to stop the current Israeli attacks, which bear all the trademarks of collective punishment, crimes against humanity and war crimes. In that connection, we welcome the outcome of the ninth special session of the Human Rights Council on the grave violations of human rights in the occupied Palestinian territory, including the recent aggression in the occupied Gaza Strip. We support the resolution adopted by the Council which, inter alia, calls for condemnation of the Israeli regime's ongoing military operations in the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly in the Gaza Strip; the immediate cessation of the Israeli regime's military attacks throughout the Palestinian occupied territory, particularly in the Gaza Strip; and the immediate withdrawal of its military forces from the Gaza Strip. In the same vein, we strongly support the Human Rights Council in its decision to dispatch an urgent independent international fact-finding mission to investigate all violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law by the Israeli occupying Power against the Palestinian people throughout the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly in the Gaza Strip.

Despite its mandate to provide a full and effective response to such circumstances, no effective action has thus far been taken by the Security Council to stop the massacre of the Palestinians. The Security Council was

first prevented by some permanent members from taking any action. When it belatedly took action, the resolution it adopted — resolution 1860 (2009) — did not address the expectations of the international community, inter alia, with regard to forcing the Israeli regime to stop its atrocities against the Palestinians and withdraw from Gaza, or even in strongly condemning the Israeli regime's crimes against humanity and devising a mechanism for holding Israeli officials accountable for the war crimes and the crimes against humanity they have committed and continue to perpetrate against the Palestinian people in general and in the Gaza Strip in particular. Even that resolution, as imperfect and belated as it is, is being totally ignored by the Israeli regime, like many other previous United Nations resolutions to which its response has been contempt and defiance.

We are of the view that now that the Security Council has been unable to stop those criminal acts, the General Assembly, as the most representative and democratic body of the United Nations, should take immediate measures to put pressure on the Israeli regime to end the carnage. Today, the Assembly should adopt a resolution to condemn those atrocities and to call for, first, an immediate end to Israeli attacks and aggression against the innocent Palestinian people in Gaza; secondly, the immediate Israeli withdrawal from Gaza; thirdly, the lifting of the blockade; fourthly, the opening of crossings; and, fifthly, the urgent provision of humanitarian assistance to the people there.

The deliberate indiscriminate attacks by the Israeli military against civilian targets in the Gaza Strip and the massive use of prohibited weapons are grave violations of international humanitarian law and constitute war crimes. Despite the Zionist regime's claims, the widespread use of force and violence is aimed at the whole population of the Gaza Strip and, as such, amounts to genocide. There is no doubt that the Israeli regime's atrocities against Palestinians in the besieged Gaza Strip are tantamount to crimes against humanity. We firmly believe that urgent action needs to be taken at the United Nations to defend the Palestinian population being collectively punished by policies that amount to a crime against humanity, as they have rightly been characterized by the United Nation Human Rights Council's Special Rapporteur on human rights in Palestinian territory.

I should like to remind everyone that the report of the Special Rapporteur was presented well before the shocking atrocities committed during the past 20 days against the Palestinians. The outrageous crimes committed during those 20 days have left no excuse: the international community must take urgent action to stop the Israeli war machine and to prosecute its leaders. The Israeli regime's leaders and military commanders must be indicted and prosecuted for grave violations of international law and for committing multiple crimes against humanity and war crimes.

The Security Council and the International Criminal Court should exercise their responsibility to bring the criminals to justice and prevent impunity. The General Assembly, for its part, may also take the necessary measures to put in place an arrangement or mechanism under Article 22 of the Charter to investigate the crimes committed by the Israeli regime against the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip.

Before I conclude, I wish to reiterate my Government's unwavering and continuing support for the Palestinian people in their rightful and legitimate efforts and struggle to exercise their right of self-determination.

Mr. Le Luong Minh (Viet Nam): On behalf of the Vietnamese delegation, I would like to thank you, Mr. President, for convening this emergency meeting of the General Assembly. I would also like to thank Ambassador Abelardo Moreno Fernández of Cuba for presenting the common position of the Non-Aligned Movement, which Viet Nam completely shares and supports.

The escalation of violence and the losses and suffering of the Palestinian people in Gaza as a result of the illegal Israeli bombings and military operations have been a cause of deep concern for the international community. We are gravely concerned about the loss of the lives of so many innocent people — including many defenceless women, children and humanitarian personnel — and about the massive destruction to their homes and property, as well as to Gaza's infrastructure and to United Nations facilities, including schools and hospitals.

Faced with the gravity of the current crisis, my delegation emphasizes the need to cease all military activities and violence and to provide immediate protection for the Palestinian civilian population in Gaza in accordance with international humanitarian law. We urge all parties concerned to respond to the repeated appeals of the international community and to

implement without delay Security Council resolution 1860 (2009), which was adopted a week ago and provides for an immediate, durable and fully respected ceasefire, the unimpeded provision and distribution throughout Gaza of humanitarian assistance and the sustained re-opening of the border crossings into Gaza on the basis of the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access.

We urge Israel to stop all military operations, immediately withdraw forces from Gaza and lift the blockade and restrictions against the Palestinian population, thus creating the basic conditions for halting the cycle of violence and resolving the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Viet Nam supports the adoption by the General Assembly of a resolution to that effect.

United Nations agencies, including the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), other humanitarian organizations and the international community play a crucial and indispensable role in providing emergency assistance to the Palestinian people in Gaza. We urge the parties concerned to facilitate the safe and unhindered operations of humanitarian personnel on the ground and to take measures to ensure their safety. In solidarity with the suffering people of Palestine in Gaza, the Vietnamese Government has decided to provide emergency assistance, which is to be transmitted to UNRWA for further distribution.

Violence and counter-violence will neither advance mutual peace and security for Palestinians and Israelis nor help them to achieve the internationally recognized and desired goal of a two-State solution. At this critical juncture, we call upon all parties concerned to exercise the utmost restraint, renounce all actions that may cause further bloodshed and immediately return to peaceful negotiations to resolve the remaining disputes. Viet Nam stands ready to support and contribute to the intensified and coordinated efforts of the United Nations, countries of the region and the international community at large to find a durable solution that might help end the continuing loss of innocent lives, prevent the current situation from recurring or further escalating and put the peace process back on track.

In conclusion, I wish to reaffirm Viet Nam's steadfast support for the peaceful settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and for the right of the Palestinian people to exercise self-determination and sovereignty in their independent State of Palestine, living side by side in peace with Israel within secure and recognized borders, on the basis of the road map, the Arab Peace Initiative, the Annapolis joint understanding and the relevant United Nations resolutions, including those of the Security Council.

Mr. Almansoor (Bahrain) (*spoke in Arabic*): We would like to convey our great appreciation to you, Mr. President, for your prompt response to the calls to resume the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly to consider the illegal Israeli actions and practices in the occupied Palestinian territories, especially in the Gaza Strip. We commend your noble position with regard to the brutal Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip.

My delegation supports the statements made by the Permanent Representative of Morocco on behalf of the Arab Group and by the Permanent Representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement.

This meeting is taking place 20 days after the beginning of the premeditated and methodically planned Israeli aggression against the occupied Gaza Strip, which to date has resulted in more than 1,000 Palestinian civilians martyred and over 5,000 wounded, most of them women, children and the elderly. This has been done through the use of Israel's sophisticated war machine, which employs every possible modern lethal weapon, including internationally banned white phosphorus bombs, which have now been used for the first time. Those weapons have caused the widespread destruction to inhabited homes, destroyed Palestinian infrastructure and produced generalized destruction of unprecedented magnitude.

The world is still witnessing Israel's ferocious war machine raining its fire and lethal rockets down on Gaza from the air, land and sea, turning the Gaza Strip into rubble. The world has seen what Israel is doing to innocent Palestinians. The more dead and wounded Palestinians there are each day, the more Israel thirsts to continue its aggression to blindly cause more death and destruction. Today, there has been yet another act of military escalation — the most violent since Israel began its aggression against the Gaza Strip.

In an effort to bring an end to that unjust aggression, the international community has from the beginning followed the efforts and daily contacts

among Arab States at every level. On 8 January, the Security Council adopted resolution 1860 (2009), which calls for an immediate and durable ceasefire that leads to the full withdrawal of Israeli forces from the Gaza Strip. Nevertheless, the resolution has been totally rejected by Israel. Soon after its adoption, the Israeli Prime Minister stated that Israel was not concerned by the resolution and that it was no more than a dead letter. In so doing, Israel is flouting the provisions of the resolution and the responsibility and mandate of the Security Council for the maintenance of international peace and security. Having taken that position, in line with its past practices, Israel has completely aborted every international effort to end the aggression. By ignoring and showing contempt for the United Nations and the international community, Israel has placed itself above the rules of international law. Such an intransigent stance by Israel serves to erode the work of the United Nations, weaken its role and paralyze its activities. In fact, the credibility of the Security Council and the United Nations in standing up to Israel in this crisis is currently being tested as a result of the disdain with which Israel looks upon Security Council and General Assembly resolutions.

In an important resolution adopted on 12 January 2009, the Human Rights Council condemned Israeli military operations in Gaza and decided to establish a fact-finding commission to investigate Israel's violations in the Gaza Strip. That resolution also calls on the Secretary-General to investigate the targeting of the premises of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), including the bombing of its schools, which led to scores of deaths among Palestinian civilians, including women and children.

From the beginning of the crisis, the Kingdom of Bahrain joined international efforts to stop Israel's unjustified aggression. We have made tireless efforts on the political and humanitarian fronts to put an end to the bloodshed. In a public address on 8 January 2009, His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa Al-Khalifa of Bahrain expressed deep concern and sadness in connection with the hundreds of martyred Palestinian civilians. He also called for an end to this mass tragedy and the human suffering of the peaceful civilian population of Gaza. In order to alleviate the terrible suffering of the Palestinian people, His Majesty directed the royal charity to rebuild, at his personal expense, UNRWA's Al-Fakhura school in the Jabaliya camp. He has allocated $3 million for the rebuilding of the school, which was bombed by Israel, resulting in the martyrdom or wounding of scores, including women and children. In addition, the Kingdom of Bahrain has today dispatched another convoy of humanitarian assistance destined for the brotherly Palestinian people. Bahrain has also supported the initiative of His Excellency President Hosni Mubarak of Egypt. We have welcomed Security Council resolution 1860 (2009), supported all other efforts and initiatives by friendly countries to stop the blatant aggression and called on the international community to assume its responsibility.

Needless to say, the basic problem continues to be Israel's occupation of Palestinian territory. Recent years have demonstrated that Arab States have made strenuous efforts to achieve a peaceful resolution to this problem. However, Israel, the occupying Power, has continued to undermine and hamper every peaceful overture, as well as to generally outmanoeuvre peace efforts and initiatives by creating successive crises in order to scuttle those efforts. Whenever the region comes closer to peace, Israel creates yet another problem. Israel's rejection of the Arab Peace Initiative, which was adopted at the Beirut Arab summit in 2002 to complement the efforts of the international Quartet and set out the prerequisites for peace and the establishment of a Palestinian State, with Jerusalem as its capital, is still fresh in our minds.

Today we face a very serious situation whose repercussions may spread to the entire Middle East region. Preserving the credibility of the United Nations requires the Organization to compel Israel to respect all the relevant resolutions of the Security Council and the General Assembly. The Palestinian people have made sacrifices for the past 60 years in the hope of achieving justice and recovering their full rights. The Kingdom of Bahrain stands alongside the international community in emphasizing the need to put an end to Israeli aggression and to heal the wounds of the Palestinian people. Let us all work together for peace, our ultimate goal.

Mr. Ja'afari (Syrian Arab Republic) (*spoke in Arabic*): I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude and appreciation to you, Mr. President, for responding quickly to the appeal by the Coordinating Bureau of the Non-Aligned Movement to reconvene the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly.

We are meeting here today, overwhelmed with grief, to consider yet again Israel's renewed acts of aggression against the Palestinian people in Gaza. Regrettably, Israel's acts of aggression are now a permanent item on the agenda of the General Assembly, in particular, and on that of the United Nations in general. That has been the case since Israel's inception, due to its decades-old occupation of Arab and Palestinian territories and the deviant behaviour of its leaders and their perpetration of war crimes under the absolute protection of their guardians and of those who cover up their crimes, especially those who pay lip service to the rights of flora, fauna and humankind alike.

The unabated aggression by Israel, which is armed to the teeth, against the unarmed Palestinian people is now in its twentieth day. In those 20 days, the Security Council has gone from a total failure to adopt a resolution to maintain international peace and security to a failure of a larger scope, represented by its inability to enforce its resolutions, despite the fact that Article 25 of the Charter is very clear with respect to the enforceability of Security Council resolutions. After fabricating a political and moral difficulty that has no justification whatsoever, the Security Council failed to move to put an end to the cowardly Israeli acts of aggression, supported by an advanced American military war machine, on the women and children of Gaza.

After such shameful difficulty, the Security Council assisted in the birth, by caesarean section, of a weak resolution devoid of will and means of implementation. The resolution pleads with Israel to put an end to its military operations. As expected, Israel, with the full protection of its guardians and partners, refused to implement the resolution, thus eroding international peace and security.

The Security Council therefore stands today paralysed, unable to give legitimacy to this new birth and incapable of holding Israeli leaders accountable for failing to respect the provisions of resolution 1860 (2009). Since this is not the first time that the Security Council has taken pride in its inability to shoulder its responsibilities — it has done so repeatedly with respect to Israel, beginning in 1948 — all of us are now obligated to implore the General Assembly to address this failure by the Council, the credibility of which has become a laughing stock throughout the world in general and in our region in particular.

The Council has even become the subject of sarcasm, particularly since it has shown unprecedented determination under other, far less important or serious circumstances, and despite the fact that such interventions by the Council have led to the dismembering of States and threatened other States with dismemberment. The Council has failed to implement all of its resolutions relative to the Middle East and the question of Palestine, foremost among which are resolutions 242 (1967), 338 (1973) and 497 (1981). The list goes on and on, for a very simple reason — these resolutions simply concern Israel. It is as if the Security Council custom-tailors measures that have no or little bearing on the interests of our countries, but are strictly confined to the very narrow interests of some influential States, with the sole objective of placing Israel above international law. In this way, the Security Council pursues racial discrimination that runs counter to the ethics on which our Organization was founded, in accordance with the Charter.

Unfortunately, resolution 1860 (2009) has met the same fate as all the other resolutions on Israel that occasionally emerge from the Council's discussions — indeed, each and every time Israel commits a new act of aggression against States in the region under the flagrant protection of its guardians.

The people of Gaza, busy burying their dead, have neither the time nor the ability to express their joy at the Council's adoption of its recent resolution, the Council having failed time and again to provide them with protection. It appears that they have lost their last hope in a Security Council that takes very lightly the deaths of over 1,000 Palestinians to date, in full view of those who happily prevaricate and scheme, and whose dormant consciences remain unmoved before the carnage of more than 500 children and 200 women, the annihilation of entire families at the hands of war criminals — the Israeli leaders — who have become specialists in killing women and children and who compete with each other over who can kill the largest number of Palestinians in order to win the post of Israeli premier minister.

Sources indicate that the numbers will turn out to be significantly higher than those originally given, due to the many seriously injured victims and the lack of medical expertise and supplies. Moreover, coverage of these atrocities could not be transmitted on television

screens simply because the Israeli occupation forces would not allow the media to enter the Strip.

To give just a snapshot to the Assembly of the barbarity of the Israeli attack, the Israeli war machine struck a school run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in Jabaliya, killing 43 women and children who had taken refuge there thinking that the United Nations compound would protect them. In the face of irrefutable evidence, Israel admitted that it deliberately shelled that school. Apparently, no one in this international Organization has moved to hold the leaders of the Israeli aggression accountable for this recent crime.

Failure to hold the Israeli leaders accountable has led to one reality — Israeli leaders who are emboldened to persist in their crimes and who order further attacks against United Nations headquarters like those they had ordered on two previous occasions — both in Qana, Lebanon, in 1996 and 2006. Let us recall that hundreds of Lebanese civilians who had taken refuge in the United Nations compound in southern Lebanon, thinking that they would be safe from the Israeli inferno, were killed at that time. Worse still is the fact that the Israeli decision to attack the United Nations headquarters in Gaza coincided with the presence of the Secretary-General in Israel in pursuit of peace.

Despite this negative Israeli attitude, world public opinion and peacelovers have succeeded in making Israel a pariah entity led by a group of negligent racists who compete among each other in such a cowardly manner as to shed the blood of defenceless Palestinians and who take pride in their sadistic instincts in televised interviews. It is ironic that the guardians of Israel, who are in the minority now, thank God, continue to say that Israel is an oasis of democracy. What democracy are we talking about?

The failure of the Security Council to shoulder its responsibilities has prompted the General Assembly to fulfil its mandate under the Charter of the United Nations to preserve international peace and security, and that is what the Assembly has gratefully done.

The suffering of the Palestinian people has become a testing ground for Israel's poisonous actions inspired by the law of the jungle. Palestinian sorrow has become a rich substance used in cheap political exchanges and dehumanizing prevarications. While the West cries over a Holocaust that it caused, incited and committed, we find that it is now in the process of attempting to cover up another holocaust committed by Israel against the Palestinian people. What obvious hypocrisy and what a shameful moral failure! Let them stop promoting their lies about oases of democracy and the principles of human rights. Let them halt their conspiracy against the Sudan, Zimbabwe, Myanmar, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Iraq, especially given the fact that these extremist partners in crime are promoting regrettable propaganda to the effect that Israel is fighting in Gaza against Palestinian women and children in defence of the values of what it calls the "free world".

Despite the stark clarity of the United Nations Charter in condemning foreign occupation, acts of aggression and racial discrimination, and despite irrefutable facts and testimony by senior officials and United Nations rapporteurs proving that Israel is violating international law, international humanitarian law, the Fourth Geneva Convention, the United Nations Charter and even the conditions of membership in the United Nations, certain States have consecrated the upholding of Israel above the heritage of humanitarian law and have immunized the rulers of Israel, since the establishment of the State of Israel, against any legal or criminal prosecution or accountability before the law for the crimes and massacres committed against the Palestinian people for decades.

If the Security Council is unable to assume the grave responsibilities entrusted to it under the Charter, the General Assembly must, under the circumstances, hold the Security Council accountable for its failure, even paralysis, in addressing the suffering of people throughout the world. The Council must be held accountable for its lack of democracy and transparency when addressing international crises that truly threaten international peace and security and for its stark selectivity, verging on racial discrimination and superiority, when addressing certain issues involving the international community.

The international community, if we can assume that it does exist, is called upon to hold the leaders of Israel accountable for repeated crimes described under the law as war crimes, crimes against humanity and crimes of genocide. As such, the Security Council, the Human Rights Council and all other specialized organs established to protect and promote human rights are duty-bound to hold Israeli leaders accountable and to

punish them for committing war crimes. Here, we wish to recall that the Human Rights Council, which is only three years old, has held four special sessions to address Israel's terrorist behaviour against the Palestinian people.

Just a few days ago, the Council adopted a resolution calling for an international fact-finding mission to investigate Israeli violations of international human rights law in Gaza. Regrettably, many of the States that sing the praises of human rights abstained in the voting on the resolution, while one State chose to vote against it. Allowing the Israeli leaders — killers of women and children — to remain at large will intensify the frustration and hatred that result from the perception by the people of the world that double standards are being used when that issue is addressed. It would also lead to a collapse of the foundations of international law and the organization of collective international action. The United Nations must therefore bring the criminals to justice in order to preserve the remaining credibility of the international community and its institutions.

Hear me clearly. When the leader of an Israeli terrorist party, Avigdor Lieberman, calls for a nuclear bomb to be dropped on Gaza to erase it from the map, it should be noted that that terrorist has held a ministerial post in the past and that he is currently the leader of the Israeli Beiteinu party, which is part of the current governmental coalition that participated in the criminal decisions leading to the situation in Israel today. Thieves take refuge in the night in order to commit their crimes. Criminals of the daylight use gangs to protect themselves from the rule of law and then take refuge in the moral bankruptcy that has befallen those who are entrusted with the implementation of international law.

Finally, we wish to encourage the presidency to submit a draft resolution that will summarize today's important discussion and express the positions of principle held by delegations on the need for the Assembly to shoulder its responsibility following the failure of the Security Council to do so in order to save the Palestinian people in Gaza from Israel's acts of aggression and to protect the martyred people from its failure to fulfil the hopes entrusted to it under the Charter.

The peace we desire in our region is a true image of peace. Everyone who seeks to promote security must seek the establishment of a just, comprehensive and genuine peace based on something that is known to all — the resolutions of international legitimacy — and on giving rights to those who are entitled to them. Unfortunately, there is no leader in Israel who is truly ready for peace and who has the true political will and vision to build a just and comprehensive peace.

Mrs. Viotti (Brazil): The words "appalling", "desperate" and "unbearable" have been used by independent observers and United Nations officials to describe the situation in Gaza. The unprecedented nature of the crisis, its increasing gravity and the failure of the parties to the conflict to comply with Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) make this session necessary and timely. We thank you, Mr. President, for your initiative.

My delegation participated in the debate held last week in the Security Council on the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question. On that occasion, I had the opportunity to express Brazil's views on the current crisis in Gaza and southern Israel. Yesterday, during the Security Council's debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, Brazil called for the full and immediate implementation of resolution 1860 (2009), especially an immediate ceasefire, the opening of crossings into Gaza, the full withdrawal of Israeli forces and the resumption of efforts to achieve a negotiated solution to the conflict.

Today we were deeply disturbed to learn of the Israeli attack on the United Nations compound, the third attack on a United Nations facility after the shelling of United Nations schools used as safe havens last week resulted in 43 deaths. We join the Secretary-General in expressing our shock and outrage. This ongoing violence cannot continue. Full accountability must be ensured.

The death toll in Gaza continues to climb at a staggering rate. It is now above 1,000, among whom an unacceptably high proportion are civilians. The number of injured exceeds 4,000. Civilians are terrorized, traumatized and feeling trapped and helpless in a deadly rage of violence and destruction. The cessation of hostilities is the only answer to this horrific crisis. The killing must stop, and it must stop now.

We commend the outstanding work done by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs under the leadership of Under-Secretary-General John Holmes and the admirable dedication of the United

Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East in the most trying of circumstances. We are encouraged by the fact that United Nations humanitarian aid, briefly interrupted after convoys were fired at, could be resumed after reassurances given by Israel were considered credible. Brazil has sought to contribute to this effort by sending 14 tons of food and medicine.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs of Brazil, Mr. Celso Amorim, has just concluded a visit to the region, where he spoke to leaders and his counterparts in Syria, Israel, Jordan, the Palestinian National Authority and Egypt. He left even more convinced that an immediate ceasefire is imperative. It is the only way to avoid further loss of innocent lives and to allow for substantial and adequate provision of urgently needed assistance.

The international community cannot allow Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) to go unheeded while innocent civilians are being killed in large numbers, thousands are injured and Gaza's infrastructure is destroyed. The credibility of our Organization and of its Security Council is at risk, with consequences that reach far beyond the present crisis. This Assembly must demand that both parties heed the call for an immediate ceasefire and fully implement resolution 1860 (2009). It is imperative to break the logic of violence, force and fear and inaugurate a cycle of dialogue, diplomacy and peace.

Mr. Al-Nasser (Qatar) (*spoke in Arabic*): Mr. President, allow me at the outset to extend our heartfelt thanks for the valuable efforts you have made to convene this special session in the light of the critical and tragic circumstances inflicted upon the Palestinian population of Gaza. We align ourselves with the statements made by the representatives of Morocco on behalf of the Group of Arab States, Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and Uganda on behalf of the member States of the Organization of the Islamic Conference.

The Gaza Strip is still covered by a thick layer of clouds billowing from the fiercest bombardment and destruction that has taken place since Israel, the occupying Power, began its military campaign. The Israeli occupation forces have killed more than 1,000 Palestinian civilians, including at least 350 infants and children and 180 women. They have injured more than 4,850 civilians, some of them seriously, and among them at least 100 infants and children.

Those horrific numbers of victims highlight the seriousness of the situation being endured by the Palestinian civilian population in Gaza, particularly by children and their families. Entire families have been wiped out, buried alive under the rubble of homes that collapsed after being hit with rockets and artillery.

The Palestinian people in Gaza are living in a constant state of fear that will have short- and long-term impacts on their lives, particularly in the light of the worsening critical humanitarian situation, as already stated by the reports of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and UNICEF.

The vicious Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip has entered its twentieth day. The Israeli forces intensified their onslaught on civilian targets in one of the most densely populated areas in the world. They have used prohibited substances, including white phosphorus, which causes deep burns and has resulted in the deaths of many Palestinians. Those phosphorus bombs have started fires that could not be extinguished and caused long-term environmental damage.

This Israeli behaviour constitutes a flagrant violation of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Furthermore, Israel has officially blocked the implementation of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009), which, inter alia, calls on it to cease fire immediately.

Israel has also ignored the Human Rights Council resolution adopted at its ninth special session (A/HRC/S-9/L.1), which calls on Israel to stop targeting civilians and civilian facilities, including educational, health and cultural buildings protected under international law.

We in the State of Qatar, like many other peoples and countries of the world, are pained to see pictures of Palestinian victims in Gaza. They are permanently imprinted on our memory. How can we forget the image of that little girl who was buried under the rubble, with only her head showing like a puppet of flesh and bones? Such pictures vividly illustrate a tragedy that reflects the unimaginable reality of the Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip. Where are the legal mechanisms related to children, women and

persons with disabilities? What is being done about the crimes committed against those people in Gaza?

The massacres committed in Gaza constitute war crimes that warrant an independent international investigation to bring the perpetrators to justice. In this context, we welcome the resolution of the Human Rights Council, adopted on 12 January, calling on the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the two Special Rapporteurs of the United Nations, and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Children and Armed Conflict, to report on violations of the human rights of Palestinians in Gaza committed by Israel through its recent acts of aggression.

The resolution also calls for dispatching an independent fact-finding mission to investigate the crimes committed against the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip during this aggression. It further requests the Secretary-General to undertake an independent investigation on the attacks against the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East schools that claimed the lives of children and adults alike.

These recent tragic events prompted His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al-Thani, Emir of the State of Qatar, to address a second speech to the international community on the evening of 14 January, in which he called for action to be taken to hold Israel accountable before national and international tribunals for the war crimes and crimes against humanity that it has perpetrated. His Highness also launched an initiative to establish a fund for the reconstruction of Gaza and announced a $250-million contribution by the State of Qatar in support of the yet-to-be-created fund. His Highness also called for setting up a sea lift in which all the Arab countries would participate in order to transport humanitarian assistance to the Gaza Strip as soon as possible.

It is truly regrettable that some equate the criminal with the victim and justify the massacres committed against the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip under the pretext of Israel's right to self-defence, turning a blind eye to all the war crimes committed by Israel in the Gaza Strip, while at the same time calling for the implementation of international humanitarian law and human rights law and for the fight against impunity in other settings and situations. What about the right of the Palestinians to be protected, to live in peace and safety and to be free of occupation. What about their right to self-determination, equity and justice and to punish those who have committed crimes against their sons and daughters?

Last but not least, the delegation of Qatar has come to this forum to appeal to the international community to act immediately to put an end to the Israeli crimes being committed in the Gaza Strip and to hold Israel accountable for its criminal acts against the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip. We support a resolution that binds Israel to implement the resolutions of the United Nations and the Security Council, starting with the immediate implementation of resolution 1860 (2009), recently adopted by the Security Council. The credibility of that United Nations body is at stake, so let us act to restore credibility to that entity before it is too late.

Mr. Limeres (Argentina) (*spoke in Spanish*): I would first like to thank you, Sir, for reconvening this emergency special session of the General Assembly on the grave situation in the Gaza Strip. On 7 January, at the open debate of the Security Council on this crisis, my country called on that organ urgently to assume its responsibilities by adopting a decision imposing an immediate and unconditional ceasefire and the withdrawal of Israeli troops from the Gaza Strip.

On 8 January, 12 days after the crisis began, the Security Council adopted its resolution 1860 (2009), which calls for an immediate, durable and fully respected ceasefire. Regrettably, one week after the adoption of that resolution by the organ of the United Nations responsible for maintaining international peace and security, resolution 1860 (2009) has yet to be implemented, resulting in the deterioration of the situation, in particular that of the Palestinian civilian population, in the Gaza Strip.

Therefore, at this emergency special session of the General Assembly, my country once again urges immediate compliance with the provisions of the Security Council resolution: an immediate and durable ceasefire leading to the full withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza, as well as the unimpeded provision and distribution of humanitarian assistance, including food, fuel and medical supplies.

In the light of paragraph 4 of resolution 1860 (2009), Argentina is sending 10 tons of humanitarian aid to assist the Palestinian population of the Gaza Strip, including medicine, other medical supplies, food and shelter supplies, to meet current needs in Gaza.

Today, 15 January, the first of several deliveries is leaving my country. They are to be stored by the Palestinian Ministry of Health in Ramallah, where they will be held until they can be sent to the Gaza Strip, pursuant not only to the needs there, but also to its real potential to reach the population.

In that context, my country would like to reiterate that the disproportionate response in the Gaza Strip has victimized the Palestinian civilian population. The unfortunate attacks on a hospital, a building housing the international media and the headquarters of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East are absolutely unacceptable, because they mainly affect the civilian population and seriously impede the efforts of the Organization and the international community to find a solution to the conflict.

I wish to stress the urgency of ensuring full respect for human rights and the obligations arising from international humanitarian law, in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949 on the protection of civilians. A temporary ceasefire lasting three hours a day is clearly insufficient, as it does not contribute to alleviating the serious and urgent humanitarian needs of the Palestinian civilian population. In addition to an unconditional ceasefire, humanitarian corridors should be open so as to allow the sustained delivery of humanitarian aid, as established in paragraph 3 of resolution 1860 (2009).

The failure to establish an immediate and durable ceasefire has exacerbated the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip. As my country said yesterday at the Security Council open debate on the protection of civilians in armed conflict, the international community must urgently adopt measures to allow humanitarian aid to effectively reach the civilian population of Gaza, or run the risk of a rapid and serious exacerbation of the humanitarian crisis, which could affect more than 1.5 million Palestinians.

Mr. Benmehidi (Algeria) (*spoke in French*): At the outset, I wish to express the gratitude of my delegation to you, Sir, for having agreed to the request of Algeria and the majority of States Members of the Organization to reconvene the tenth emergency special session on Palestine. Your responsible, wise and timely decision makes a profound contribution to defending the credibility of the United Nations and to promoting the goals and objectives of the Charter. My delegation remains convinced that, at the outcome of the tenth emergency special session, which should not be adjourned, the weight of the international community as a whole will compel the Israeli aggressor to listen to reason, after having decided deliberately to act beyond the pale of civilized nations.

My delegation would like to express to the Assembly the profound indignation of the people and the Government of Algeria in the face of the indescribable barbarism that the world has watched unfold in Gaza due to Israel's irredentism and the impunity it believes it can enjoy. Algeria most strongly condemns the Israeli aggression and categorically rejects the argument that that savage and disproportionate aggression, which violates the Charter, international law, international humanitarian law and international legality, constitutes an act of legitimate self-defence under Article 51 of the Charter.

Algeria wishes to recall that, even before the Israeli aggression had been unleashed, the Palestinian territory in Gaza was subject to an illegal and inhuman blockade, creating a disastrous situation that led the United Nations to note that none of the rights set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights were being respected there at a time when the sixtieth anniversary of the Declaration coincided with that of the Nakba, which marked the establishment of the Israeli entity. Ever since its establishment, that entity has never ceased to defy the international community and to violate all United Nations resolutions concerning it, in particular General Assembly resolution 181 (II) of 29 November 1947, which provided for its creation.

It is time that the international community consider ways and means to put an end to the arrogance and disregard for law shown by Israel, which seems to believe that it will be guaranteed impunity under any circumstances. It is time that its outlaw behaviour be treated as such and that the arsenal available to the international community be used against those responsible for that behaviour and their accomplices.

After the scandal of Gaza, the international community should no longer be afraid to address the legitimacy of Israel's membership in the United Nations. Resolution 273 (III) of 11 May 1949, whereby that entity was admitted to the Organization, states in its paragraph 1, "Decides that Israel is a peace-loving State which accepts the obligations contained in the

Charter and is able and willing to carry out those obligations". Is that the case today? The answer is clear: Israel is a bellicose entity that practices State terrorism, rejects the obligations contained in the Charter and is unwilling to carry out those obligations, as clearly stated by its leaders today and as demonstrated by its behaviour as an occupying Power for at least the past 40 years.

In addition to rejecting its Charter obligations, Israel has demonstrated that it has made it a State policy to violate international law and international humanitarian law, in particular the Fourth Geneva Convention of 1949, all international human rights instruments and all international norms on the protection of civilians in armed conflict. Through the carnage that it has openly perpetrated in Gaza since 27 December 2008, Israel intends to defy the very foundations of international criminal justice by establishing crimes against humanity and war crimes as means of diplomatic pressure, while enjoying total impunity.

Algeria welcomes the position taken by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Human Rights Council's decision to set up an independent fact-finding commission to establish the facts concerning the massive human rights violations in Gaza. If the credibility of the United Nations has been undermined because of the Security Council's inability, for various reasons, to ensure an immediate end to the Israeli aggression, that credibility will be gauged in future by its efforts to combat impunity. In world opinion, such efforts are linked to the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, whose promoters are being challenged in the same way as the United Nations.

Algeria welcomes the important statement that you made, Mr. President, at the opening meeting of the resumed tenth emergency special session. We fully share your expressed desire to see the United Nations address the extremely grave situation in Gaza by bringing together the General Assembly, the Security Council and the Secretary-General. Following the Council's adoption of resolution 1860 (2009) on 8 January 2009, Algeria rightly believed that that measure fell short of the expectations of the international community, which demands a total halt to the aggression and the immediate withdrawal of Israeli troops. Nonetheless, Algeria, respectful of the Charter, believes that the resolution should be implemented immediately and unconditionally.

In that connection, Mr. President, we agree with the point of view that you expressed — and that the Secretary-General shares — regarding the need for an immediate ceasefire, which should not be conditioned on an end to the ongoing diplomatic efforts. Indeed, all diplomatic efforts and initiatives now under way should be supported by the international community. In that connection, my delegation would like to encourage you to submit to the General Assembly for its adoption a draft resolution focusing on the two main concerns that you expressed: the demand for an immediate and unconditional ceasefire and the immediate restoration of unimpeded humanitarian access. That, in our view, is the purpose of our meeting today under your wise and informed guidance.

Mr. Chowdhury (Bangladesh): Thank you, Mr. President, for the resumption of the tenth emergency special session. Given the gravity of the situation and the dire humanitarian catastrophe being incrementally and brutally perpetrated by the Israeli military forces in the Gaza Strip, my delegation considers this resumed session most timely and attaches great importance to it. We commend you for your comprehensive statement this morning.

Bangladesh aligns itself with the statements made on behalf of the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the Non-Aligned Movement. In addition, we would like to highlight the following points.

Bangladesh strongly condemns the ongoing indiscriminate Israeli attacks in Gaza, which are now entering their fourth week. We are appalled by the scale and intensity of the devastation and by the deaths of innocent Palestinians, including women and children, caused by massive military attacks. The death toll has exceeded 1,000, and thousands more — most of them civilians — have been severely injured. There are painful reports that Gaza is running out of places to bury the dead. The killing of innocent Palestinian civilians is totally unacceptable under any circumstances.

We cannot and must not tolerate the ceaseless violation of international humanitarian law and international human rights law by the Israeli occupying forces. It is distressing to see that even humanitarian workers are being killed by the Israeli attacks. We were utterly disturbed to learn today that Gaza's United

Nations compound — a universal symbol of unity and peace — is not safe from the occupying forces. We strongly condemn these heinous actions of the Israeli Government, which are blatant violations of international law.

Bangladesh calls for an immediate halt to the Israeli attacks, which are causing innumerable civilian deaths and the massive destruction of infrastructure in the Gaza Strip. Israel must comply with Security Council resolution 1860 (2009), adopted on 8 January. The United Nations, in particular the Security Council, must undertake all measures necessary to immediately ensure the full and effective implementation of resolution 1860 (2009). Border crossings should be ensured forthwith for persons and goods. Humanitarian workers must be guaranteed full and secure access to the Palestinian population, who are in dire need of food, medicine, water, electricity and shelter.

Mr. Mohamad (Sudan) (*spoke in Arabic*): Three weeks have now elapsed since the settler colonial authorities in occupied Palestine launched their criminal campaign killing women, children and elderly people in cold blood and destroying property. They are defying all humanitarian principles and displaying contempt for the United Nations.

A few days after ejecting the Special Rapporteur on the human rights situation, Israel bombed a school run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), killing children who had taken refuge there. This is no surprise since it was Israel, the occupying Power, that killed Count Bernadette, the United Nations envoy, decades ago. It was the same occupying Power that has been flagrantly violating all United Nations resolutions and international legal instruments.

History is repeating itself. What we see in Gaza today reminds us of previous times under the apartheid regime in South Africa. At that time we had Soweto and Sharpeville and today we have Sabra and Shatila, Qana, Khan Yunis, Dair Yasin, Jenin, Hayy al-Zaytoun and other towns. If the apartheid regime was the aggressor against African frontline States in the past, then today Israel is the aggressor against Lebanon and continues to occupy the Syrian Golan Heights. We repeat: history is repeating itself. If the apartheid regime in South Africa justified itself by referring to the Cuban presence in Angola, then Israel is justifying itself by claiming it is responding to stone-throwing by children, who are simply resisting occupation. There is no comparison between those who kill and those who are killed.

The General Assembly has lost patience and must demand forcefully an end to the massacre of the Palestinian people, the bloodshed and the terror campaign against women, children and the elderly. The blockade must be lifted to allow access for humanitarian assistance to the people of Gaza.

Those who speak of genocide and impunity must now tell us what they are going to do about the crimes perpetrated by the Israeli occupying Power in Gaza. Those who speak of the responsibility to protect must also tell us what they are going to do about those crimes. The Assembly must forcefully demand that the occupation end and that an independent Palestinian State be created, with Jerusalem as its capital. Otherwise, the days of suffering of the Palestinian people will always be Gaza days.

We thank you, Sir, for your interest and support for the Palestinian cause and people since assuming the presidency of the General Assembly at its sixty-third session. We are proud of you and of your efforts, as we are also proud of the support shown by millions of people for the suffering Palestinian people. That is the best support that can be given to them as they wait for freedom and independence.

Mr. Al-Jarman (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me at the outset to express the gratitude of my delegation for the prompt response to our call to reconvene the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly to consider illegal Israeli actions in occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the occupied Palestinian territory, and especially the situation in Gaza over the past 20 days. My delegation wishes to thank the Deputy Secretary-General for her important statement on the situation in Gaza (see A/ES-10/PV.32). My delegation also supports the statements made by the representative of Cuba on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement and by the representative of Morocco on behalf of the Arab Group.

The United Arab Emirates condemns the barbaric aggression by Israel, the occupying Power, against civilians in the Gaza Strip, which has continued since 27 December 2008 and which has made use of excessive force and internationally banned weapons to bomb civilian homes and destroy infrastructure. Israel is besieging unarmed inhabitants and has caused the

deaths of more than 1,000 persons — 40 per cent of them women and children — and has wounded more than 5,000, half of them women and children. Tens of thousands have been displaced. These numbers continue to grow each day.

In addition, obstacles have been put in place to delay the delivery of internal and international humanitarian and medical assistance to the injured and the displaced, including women, children, the elderly and the disabled. This exacerbates the suffering of the victims in an inhumane manner and places the region on the verge of an intolerable and unacceptable humanitarian catastrophe. In addition to the threats to international peace and security, we are gravely concerned at the ongoing violence and the human suffering of the people of Gaza. We express our solidarity with them and their plight, and we stand ready to deploy all possible efforts to alleviate their suffering and put an end to their tragedy.

We meet today following Israel's refusal, again, to comply with Security Council resolutions relevant to the Palestinian question, the most recent of which is Council resolution 1860 (2009) of 8 January, in addition to its flagrant violations of international law and international humanitarian law. We call upon the Security Council and the international community, including the General Assembly, to assume their responsibilities to maintain international peace and security and to protect Palestinian civilians.

In view of the catastrophe suffered by the inhabitants of Gaza, the United Arab Emirates calls on the international community to intensify its efforts to compel Israel to comply with Council resolution 1860 (2009), to put an end to the violence, to implement an immediate ceasefire, to lift the blockade and open the border crossings, to provide access for humanitarian and relief assistance to the inhabitants and to withdraw totally from Gaza. Israel must abide by the resolutions of international legitimacy and international humanitarian law and live up to its responsibilities as an occupying Power as stipulated in The Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907 and in the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols.

We welcome the fact that resolution S-9/1, adopted by the Human Rights Council on 12 January 2009, calls for the urgent dispatch of an independent fact-finding mission to investigate Israel's violations of international law and international humanitarian law against the Palestinian population in the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly in the Gaza Strip, and for bringing those responsible to justice. At the same time, we urge the international community and influential parties to press Israel to resume peace talks in order to reach a final settlement of the Palestinian question and the Middle East problem, on the basis of all relevant international resolutions.

We underscore that the international community and the specialized agencies and bodies of the United Nations should continue their efforts to effectively address the political, humanitarian, socio-economic and security repercussions of this crisis. The United Arab Emirates has assumed its humanitarian responsibilities both as a member of the group of donors to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and by working to provide urgent assistance to the Palestinian people in Gaza through an emergency meeting it hosted in Abu Dhabi on 13 January for donor countries, charitable organizations of the United Arab Emirates and other international humanitarian organizations, in order to coordinate the delivery of relief assistance to the population of Gaza and to rehabilitate important educational, health and other infrastructure.

In this respect, it is our hope that the political diplomatic initiatives and international and regional efforts that are currently being deployed will put an end to the tragic situation in Gaza, provide relief to the civilian population, bring about the resumption of the peace talks between all of the concerned parties, and bring an end to the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories and the establishment of an independent Palestinian State.

The President (*spoke in Spanish*): Tomorrow is going to be a rather difficult day. It is going be freezing, dangerous, with lots of ice; it will be a sacrifice to go outdoors. I have some good boots that a colleague has given me; I will be wearing them. But I do ask delegates, please, to make that sacrifice, because none of our sacrifices can compare to the suffering of our brothers and sisters in Gaza. They need a voice of hope. So please let us all be here tomorrow, and let us all participate in adopting the draft resolution which has so far garnered very widespread support.

We will meet tomorrow at 10 a.m., and be careful with the cold.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.